

## IDENTIFY YOUR COPING MECHANISMS

A coping mechanism is a strategy used to deal with suffering, discomfort, fear, abandonment, and pain. They are natural, “mortal” responses (fight, flight & freeze responses) created in our childhood for emotional (& sometimes physical) survival. If they were not created by and used by a child, the child would be overwhelmed. A coping mechanism is a way to construct boundaries to protect the personality.

The problem is that most of us continue these coping mechanisms into adult life, which then continues an erroneous pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are used whenever the person is in discomfort (their perception of being physically or emotionally unsafe). The result is that the situation or problem creating the discomfort is not evaluated as an adult but is reacted to through historical (child) thinking. The person reacts to a situation as if it is the same unsafe situation it was in childhood. [“I am afraid of men.”] The true event is lost in the coping mechanism reactivity which re-enforces the feelings of fear even when the situation is safe. The focus then is upon the doing of the mechanism to stay safe. This prevents taking in new information, awareness, and feelings that would provide the ingredients to a rational response.

The following reflects many of the common coping mechanisms carried over from childhood by adults (or created later in life in response to emotional overwhelm that is still viewed from a helpless, childlike, perspective).

- Deny having a problem
- Forgetting
- Hiding behind partner
- Repeating abuse
- Numbing out
- Avoid discussing abuse
- Feel guilty
- Negative self-talk
- Physical problems
- Chronic masturbation
- Crying inappropriately
- Passive behavior
- Dissociating
- Hyper-vigilance/easy to startle
- Suicidal thoughts
- Over-exercising
- Take what is said or done personally
- Agree to most everything, hard to say “no.”
- Staying busy to avoid feeling & thinking
- Need to be in Relationship to feel okay
- Unable to define what I want or need
- Rigid and controlling behaviors-coercion, advice giving, manipulation, acting helpless
- Ignore problems or pretend they aren't happening-denial of impact, effect, or importance
- Will not set boundaries in relationships to insure my rights are respected.
- Sexual issues in marriage
- Staying in unhealthy or abusive relationships
- Withdrawal
- Sleeping a lot
- Out-of-body
- Staying in control
- Avoiding men
- Fantasizing
- Blaming self
- Victim of life
- Overeating
- Angry often
- Act confused or dumb
- Underachieving
- Trance
- Overspending
- Promiscuous
- Religious fanaticism
- Rationalizing
- Creating chaos
- Not sleeping
- Humor/never serious
- Depression
- Anxiety attacks
- Blaming others
- Distrust others
- Under-eating
- Disclose inappropriately
- Substance abuse
- Overachieving
- Self-mutilation
- Hoarding
- Act out violently
- Pornography use/addiction